

Expression of Interest:

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP ON BENIN ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING

Background on TechnoServe

TechnoServe is an international nonprofit organization that promotes business solutions to poverty in the developing world. It is headquartered in Washington, DC and operates in 29 countries worldwide. TechnoServe's mission is to work with enterprising men and women in the developing world to build competitive farms, businesses and industries. It does this by linking people to information, capital and markets. With nearly 50 years of proven results, TechnoServe believes in the power of private enterprise to transform lives.

Overview of the partnership

TechnoServe is seeking a academic researcher partner that would be integrated into an existing entrepreneurship training program to provide thought partnership in designing, analyzing, and publishing the results from the project's evaluation. The goals of the partnership would be:

1. Demonstrate the effectiveness of “best-fit” evaluation principles. RCTs are expensive, cumbersome, and slow and thus frequently inappropriate or infeasible for evaluating development projects. Many academics, have advocated for “best-fit” principles. This partnership would provide opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of, and perhaps refine, best fit evaluation principles by producing quality research through low-cost and practical evaluations.
2. Nonprofits such as TechnoServe frequently produce valuable finding that are limited in their reach and influence because internal evaluations are not regarded as rigorous. This partnership would help our findings make it into the public domain and build on the evidence base on which types of interventions are effective.
3. When opportunity arises TechnoServe would be interested in integrating research questions that extend beyond our M&E objectives.

About the project

BeniBiz is 5-year program TechnoServe is launching in Benin funded by the Dutch government. The program will provide 4 months of targeted technical assistance to 2500 microentrepreneurs on good business management practices and production processes with the goal of improving business profits. The entrepreneurs must be between 18 and 35 years old, and operate an informal business that has been open for at least 6 months and have annual sales less than XOF 10M (about 18,000 UD) and more than 1M XOF. The program will also facilitate access to finance and market linkages. The project will use a cohort system in which 250 participants are trained at a time (organized into training groups of 5 with 5 training groups per TechnoServe Business Advisor), with a cohort starting every 6 months. TechnoServe's business advisors will collect each business' financial data during their monthly visits.

Research methods

The project will have 9 cohorts, which allows for a time series roll-out analysis. The team is willing to randomize assignment to cohorts, allowing for future cohorts to serve as a counterfactual for earlier

cohorts. Recruiting several years in advance is likely to be difficult so there will likely be multiple rounds of randomization.

Research questions

Primary research question

- What impact does tailored business advisory services have on incomes for microentrepreneurs in Benin?

Possible secondary research questions

- What is the most cost-effective level of support? (The team is willing to consider providing participants with a varying number of hours of support, or extend/shorten the number of months the businesses receive support).
- What is the most accurate way to measure financial impacts when working with informal micro entrepreneurs? Specifically, what approach to collecting data on business profits at baseline is the most accurate? (Prior to starting with the project, most informal entrepreneurs have no training in finance and do not maintain financial records. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the entrepreneurs can state the total revenue that passes through their business, but costs are complicated and periodic, leading to poor estimations of income. There is some evidence, however, that entrepreneurs have a strong understanding of their margins, so simply asking total profit can be accurate.)

Engagement details

The cost of the evaluation will be covered by the donor and a budget has already been approved that includes funds for M&E activities (within the range of industry standards for normal M&E activities, but likely insufficient for elaborate research activities). The projects will have an M&E Manager and sufficient field staff and support staff, along with the resources to collect and store data. The relationship will be facilitated by TechnoServe's Manager of Corporate Measurement, James Tinker, and the Regional M&E Advisor, Tina Byenkya.

The academic partner will not receive any remuneration for their involvement. If the academic partner has their own travel funds, they are strongly encouraged to visit the field.

The academic partner would be involved in the project prior to baseline data being collected (late 2018) to advise on evaluation methods, research questions, and the development of data collection tools. The partner would then be engaged at endline as co-primary investigator to analyze and disseminate the findings.

The value in this partnership for the academic research partner will primarily be that it represents a streamlined research opportunity that can potentially lead to publication. It also provides opportunity for academics to work directly with development practitioners and gain insights into how data is utilized in the field. This will also help academics champion effective and practical real-world evaluation methodology.

In exchange, the value for TechnoServe the primary value is in having thought partnership in improving rigor of our evaluations, and being able to reach a wider audience with our results through publication and the validation that external partnership can provide.

Submitting an expression of interest

Researchers interested in engaging TechnoServe in this research partnership can email James Tinker directly at: jtinker@tns.org with the subject line "BeniBiz research partnership submission." Submissions

should be received no later than **June 14, 2018**. In the email please attach a CV and briefly state your interest in the project and your credentials as a researcher. TechnoServe will contact you within two working days to set up a time for a interview.

Selection of a research partner will be made on the following criteria based on both your CV and interview.

Section	Points
Relevant research experience	30
Alignment with TechnoServe regarding research questions and methods	40
Ability to commit to providing support	30
Total	100

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. The Expression of Interest is not and shall not be considered an offer by TechnoServe.
2. All responses must be received on or before the date and time indicated on the EOI. All late responses will be rejected.
3. TechnoServe reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal or cancel the EOI process at any time, and shall have no liability to the proposing organizations submitting proposals for such rejection or cancellation of the request for proposals.
4. TechnoServe reserves the right to accept all or part of the proposal when award is provided.
5. All information provided by TNS in this EOI is offered in good faith. Individual items are subject to change at any time, and all bidders will be provided with notification of any changes.
6. TechnoServe reserves the right to require any bidder to enter into a non-disclosure agreement
7. The bidders are solely obligated to pay for any costs, of any kind whatsoever, which may be incurred by bidder or any third parties, in connection with the Response. All responses and supporting documentation shall become the property of TechnoServe, subject to claims of confidentiality in respect of the response and supporting documentation, which have been clearly marked confidential by the bidder.